MEETING MINUTES OF
PRAIRIE TRAILS CLUB INC.
October 8, 2026
BLPOA Community Center
6996 South SR 10, Knox (Bass Lake) IN

MEMBERS	GUEST
Diane Blais	Bob Albert, Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum
Russ Blais	Walter Block
Linda Byer	
Paul Byer	
Joan Hardesty	
Kathy Lucas	
Steve Lucas	
Rhonda Milner	
Anita McMillin	
Brian McMillin	
Peggy Stalbrink	

Call to Order by President

On October 8, 2026, at 5:33 pm, CT, Rhonda Milner, President, called to order a Meeting of the Prairie Trails Club Inc. ("PTC") in the BLPOA Community Center, 6996 South SR 10, Knox, Indiana.

Review and Approval of Minutes of August 19, 2026

Steve Lucas reported that Russ Blais commented on the Kankakee River Launch Group Update in the August 19 draft minutes. As a result of Russ's comments, that item was adjusted to read as follows:

Steve said on August 5 he joined the Kankakee River Launch Group for its most recent meeting in Hebron. The current focus is on seeking to develop an access from the Jasper County side of the river at the Aukiki Wetland Conservation Area, which borders Indiana Highway 49 on the east side.

The initiative's broader goal is to establish more Kankakee River access sites. Russ spoke of a new site developed by Amie Flora, Starke County Parks Superintendent, on SR 23 at the Yellow River bridge, just South of SR 8. Steve reflected that Amie has also participated with the Group. Addition of the SR 23 access is harmonious with the Group's broader goals.

With this adjustment, Joan Hardesty moved to approve the draft minutes. Peg Stalbrink second the motion and the motion carried.

Review and Approval of Treasurer's Report of August 19 and October 8 and Report of Restricted and Unrestricted Funds of October 8

Kathy Lucas circulated written copies of two documents:

Treasurer's Report of August 19, 2026; and Treasurer's Report of October 8, 2026 including Restricted and Unrestricted Funds

These are shown below:

Treasurer's Report
August 19, 2026

FIRST FARMERS BANK & TRUST (FFBT)

Balance from July 29, 2026 (prior meeting) **$19,220.61**

INCOME

8/03/26.	Anonymous Trail User (Williamsport, IN to Paul Byer)	$20.00
8/03/26	SCCF/NICF "The Hive" award for portable restrooms & brochures	2,000.00
8/10/26	Donation from lifetime members Frankie & Dennis Newcom	25.00
8/11/26	State of Indiana reimbursement ITP 23-06	32,711.76

TOTAL INCOME **$34,756.76**

EXPENSES

8/03/26.	Online payment to Go Daddy for web donation	56.88

TOTAL EXPENSES **($59.88)**

ENDING FFBT BALANCE AS OF 8/19/26= **$53,917.49**

Treasurer's Report
October 8, 2026

FIRST FARMERS BANK & TRUST (FFBT)

Balance from August 19, 2026 (prior meeting) **$53,917.49**

INCOME

8/24/26	Cash from T-shirts, etc at Grand Opening	80.00
8/25/26	Lifetime Membership: Peg Stalbrink	250.00
8/25/26	PayPal Transfer: Pugh family	119.16
8/27/26	Dues: Larry Wickert	25.00
9/16/26.	PayPal Transfer: D.Verhagen	23.64
9/22/26	Dues: Arlene Noble	25.00
9/29/26	Dues: Yancy Lucas, Nadia Corral Frias, Chris & Tabitha Balzer.	100.00

TOTAL INCOME **$622.80**

EXPENSES

8/21/26	**Check #1250 to Fingerhut Bakery (cake for Grand Opening).**	**99.00**
8/25/26	**Check #1276 to Bob Aloi (Territorial Engineering/JPR).**	**3,285.87**
8/25/26	**Check #1277 to Hill Excavating**	**4,578.74**
8/25/26	**Check #1278 to Hill Excavating**	**16,490.33**
9/15/26.	**Check #1251 to Corey Liss for Web Support of 3 security cameras**	**525.00**
9/21/26.	**Web Order to Go Daddy**	**72.57**
9/28/26.	**Check #1252 to Jim Chessor (4 mowings @ $225 each)***	**900.00**

TOTAL EXPENSES **($25,951.51)**

ENDING FFBT BALANCE AS OF 10/08/26= $28,588.78

***(Mowings on 7/24, 8/9, 8/20 and 9/7)**

Kathy identified the extraordinary support by Corey and Charlotte Liss for funding the placement of three trail security cameras on the one-mile trail extension. These were recommended by North Judson's Town Marshal, Frank Thomas, to help discourage vandalism on the trail. She said that additionally Corey and Charlotte erected and set up the cameras, one of which was placed on a new pole. The only expenditure left for the PTC was $525 refunded to Corey for one year of service.

Kathy thanked the Newcoms, the Pughs, Larry Wickert, Arlene Noble, Kirt Verhagen, Yancy Lucas, Nadia Corral Frias, Chris Blazer, and Tabitha Lucas for continuing financial support. She expressed a particular note of appreciation to long-time supporter, Peggy Stalbrink, who became a Lifetime Member.

Kathy said the Indiana State Budget Agency calculated final billing amounts as stated by Bob Aloi exceeded by $214 what the grant authorized. If the PTC decided to contest the amount, a time-consuming audit might follow, and reimbursement could be delayed. The amount is relatively small, and there is no certainty of success. Members concurred that Kathy should make the $214 adjustment and seek final reimbursement on the grant.

Kathy reflected that with completion of the trail through North Judson, identification of restricted funds, there are only two restricted categories: Signage/Web and Maintenance.

RESTRICTED/UNRESTRICTED FUNDS 10/8/26

SIGNAGE/WEB

Luminous Fund **Signs Bass Lake (Incl UR Here)** **$685.64**

Hardesty Mem.	**Wayfinding or historic signs**	**1,707.31**
Lucas Lakehouse	**Future Vision/Website**	**662.50**
The Hive 2026	**Brochures (balance after portolets)**	**440.00**
		$3,495.45

MAINTENANCE

Hardesty Mem.	**Trail Maintenance**	**$157.24**
HVRM (Buckeye)	**Trail Maintenance**	**593.61**
Rich Stalbrink Mem.	**Maintenance or most needed**	**1,081.08**
	(less $900 for Jim Chessor mowing)	
Doral Solar	**Bridge/clearing**	**7,269.48**
Arrowhead Grant	**Invasive species control**	**145.19**
		$9,246.60

TOTAL RESTRICTED $12,742.05

FFBT Balance	**$28,588.78**
Restricted Funds	**12,742.05**
Unrestricted	**$15,846.73**

Rhonda said that she would entertain a motion to approve both the Treasurer's Report of August 19, 2026; and the Treasurer's Report of October 8, 2026 including Restricted and Unrestricted Funds. Paul Byer then so moved and Diane Blais seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Report of August 21 DNR Inspection and Approval of ITP-23-06, Grand Opening, and "Trail Town" Celebration

The successful final DNR inspection was noted. Membership then discussed positive comments received from the public on the Grand Opening of the trail extension, as well as designation North Judson as Indiana's first American Discovery Society "Trail Town".

Following these events, the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy identified the extension as part of the "preferred route" of the Great American Rail-Trail and included the extension on its website mapping. On September 21, 2026, the North Judson Council then unanimously approved a resolution seeking to relocate from Town streets the American Discovery Trail and of US Bicycle Route 35 to also utilize the new trail extension. The resolution provides:

TOWN RESOLUTION NO. 2026-06

A RESOLUTION REQUESTING THAT THE AMERICAN DISCOVERY TRAIL AND US BIKE ROUTE 35 CAUSE THEIR RESPECTIVE ROUTES BE RELOCATED TO UTILIZE THE FULL LENGTH OF THE 2026 TRAIL EXTENSION APPROVED BY THE INDIANA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Whereas, the Town of North Judson is honored as host to three Trans-America trails for bicycling, walking and running. They are the American Discovery Trail, United States Bicycle Route 35, and the Great American Rail-Trail;

Whereas, the American Discovery Trail was conceived by the American Hiking Society and Backpacker magazine and approved by the Town Council using city streets;

Whereas, in 2012 the Town Council approved a route for United States Bicycle Route 35 using streets with this Route being now managed through a collaborative partnership that includes INDOT, the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, and the Adventure Cycling Association;

Whereas, in 2018 the Town placed wayfinding signs in North Judson for these routes;

Whereas, in 2026 the American Discovery Trail Society has bestowed the status of Trail Town upon the Town of North Judson;

Whereas, also in 2026, the Indiana Department of Natural Resources has approved a one-mile nonmotorized trail extension, as ITP #23-06, through the Town of North Judson that was funded by the DNR with a cost share by the Prairie Trails Club, Inc.;

Whereas, also in 2026, the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy has approved the new trail as part of the preferred route of the Great American Rail-Trail;

And, Whereas, public safety and convenience would be served by consolidation of these routes into the new trail;

Now therefore, on the 8th day of September 2026, the North Judson Town Council now resolves and urges that the management of the American Discovery Trail and US Bike Route 35 cause their respective routes be relocated to utilize the full length of the trail extension approved by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources as ITP #23-06.

Ad Hoc Committee for Bike Racks, Bench and Signs on ITP-23-06

Kathy discussed the possibility of pursuing a new project to collect lids and obtain a bench through Green Tree Plastics in Evansville for placement near the kiosk. The bench attached to the kiosk faces the triangle and away from the trail. Members of the public have expressed interest in having a bench there that faces the trail.

There was an extended discussion among the membership. Part of the discussion was centered around a new opportunity to recycle qualified medicine bottles. A consensus was that collection of plastics for a new green bench should be resumed.

Russ and Kathy revisited the subject of obtaining new magnetic signs for placement on vehicles used by members and friends performing trail maintenance. There have been several recent occasions when trail users have challenged volunteers without signs. Rhonda said she had several old signs, but they are curled up and no longer usable. Others noted that with time, signs seem to lose their magnetism and fall off.

Russ said he spoke with Andrew Hunnicutt regarding the purchase of three sets (two signs in each set) of magnetic signs. The price quoted to Russ was competitive. The members authorized Kathy to purchase three sets of signs.

Steve said an important sign type for the trail extension is the American Discovery Trail Society's sign declaring North Judson a "Trail Town". The hope was three of that type sign would be ready at the August 21 Grand Opening. Mitch Barloga, who manages the American Discovery Trail in Indiana, said the ADT Society reconsidered the sign design, and he expects to have a new and improved version in about a month.

The Ad Hoc Committee ordered from SmartSign four plastic surveillance camera signs. The four signs were delivered on September 25. Rick Vlaming and Russ have started installation.

Steve communicated with the Great American Rail-Trail, American Discovery Trail, and US Bike Route 35 organizations regarding the transAmerican signs designed by Andy Hunnicutt. The ADT and USBR35 management were satisfied with the designs. The Rails-to-Trails Conservancy provided a new version, and Hunnicutt has made adjustments. He recently passed three transAmerican signs along for manufacture.

Vandalized but recovered signs were delivered to Rick Vlaming and Russ Blais for onsite replacement. Rick and Russ have since reinstalled several of them.

There remains a need to make ADA-compliant a green bench and student-welded bike rack located on a concrete pad believed to be the last North Judson onsite artifact of the New York Central Railroad. Access between the pad and the trail should be suitable for wheelchair use.



Final Preparations for American Discovery 250 Relay

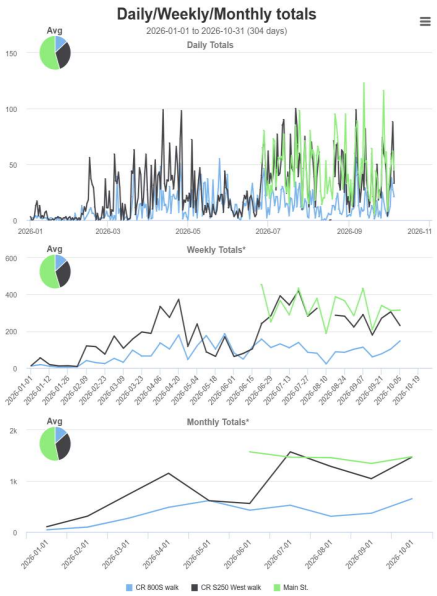
On October 6, Mitch Barloga said the Relay (possibly in two waves) was back to a likely arrival date of October 15. He added that the Town or PTC could hold a celebratory event on the morning of October 16. This new information was shared with the Town and the PTC, but both responded they would focus upon presenting an ambitious signage project by Starke County students. Diane Blais has led PTC efforts to work with local schools on project development, and about 100 signs were made. During the meeting, signs were distributed among members and plans outlined for the location and timing of placement along the route between English Lake and US Highway 35.

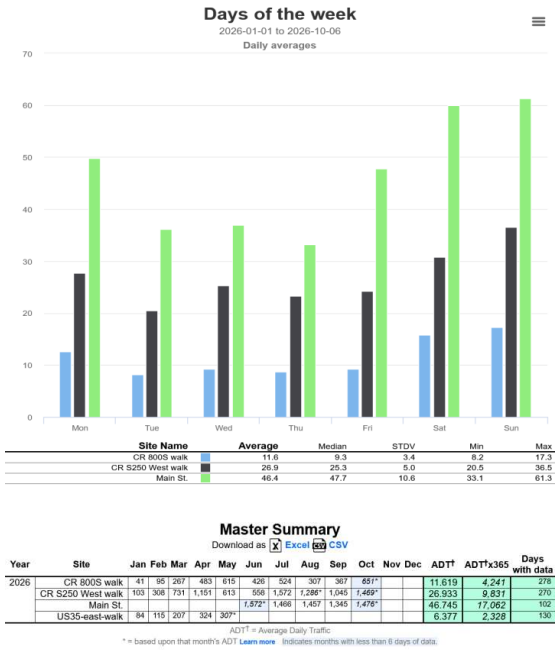


Trail Counters Update

Joan Hardesty provided the most recent data from the three working trail counters. She said would "try wiping everything off the other two and see what that does."

Brian McMillin noted the robust numbers for trail usage at the counter on Main Street just east of North Judson. Bob Albert, Liaison from the Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum, noted that he had also observed frequent usage adjacent to the HVRM's depot.





Site Name	Average	Median	STDV	Min	Max
CR 800S walk	11.6	9.3	3.4	8.2	17.3
CR S250 West walk	26.9	25.3	5.0	20.5	36.5
Main St.	46.4	47.7	10.6	33.1	61.3

Master Summary

Download as Excel CSV

Year	Site	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	ADT†	ADT†x365	Days with data
2026	CR 800S walk	41	95	267	483	615	426	524	307	367	*651**			11,619	*4,241*	278
	CR S250 West walk	103	308	731	1,151	613	558	1,572	*1,286**	1,045	*1,469**			26,933	*9,831*	270
	Main St.						*1,572**	1,466	1,457	1,345	*1,476**			46,745	*17,062*	102
	US35-east-walk	84	115	207	324	307*								6,377	*2,328*	130

ADT† = Average Daily Traffic

* = based upon that month's ADT Learn more Indicates months with less than 6 days of data.

Maintenance Report

Paul said the length of the trail has been treated with glyphosate to help control invasive species. In addition Paul and Linda Byer cut big branches above the asphalt trail that might impede bicyclists. Walter Block used a blower to remove leaves along much of the trail, and he intends to do a follow-up on the Grand Kankakee Marsh Trail before arrival of the American Discovery 250 Relay. Kathy and Steve augmented management of branches between Range Road and SCR 250 West.

Anita McMillin referenced a pavement crack near Fell Ditch and holes by groundhogs in the same vicinity. Paul responded that asphalt filled cracks in this area, but as subsidence continues, the cracks return. He said typically groundhog holes stop at the pavement edge. Within the capacity of our volunteers, efforts will be made to mitigate these concerns prior to the coming of the 250 Relay.

Continuing Discussion with Starke County Sheriff's Office

Russ said he is pursuing efforts through Starke County Chief Deputy, Wayne James, to develop an understanding and possible application of projects for inmate assistance along the trail. Walter Block expressed interest in the prospect and might be willing to use his equipment to assist with maintenance efforts. There was concurrence that any project through the Sheriff's Office would need to comply with its guidelines for safety and service. In response to a question, Russ reported that Chief Deputy James has been informed as to how to open the trail gates.

LaCrosse Grand Kankakee Marsh Trail Update

Kathy updated the members on progress of the LaPorte County NLT initiative to advance the Grand Kankakee Marsh Trail north of English Lake. Bob Aloi's crew has surveyed areas that would be expected to use an easement along the Pinsly Railroad. Construction design has begun. She said Peg Stalbrink's participation helped to bring attention to the opportunity to State Representatives Jim Pressel and Randy Novak. LaPorte County Parks Superintendent, Jeremy Sobecki, recently agreed to serve as the point person to help move the project forward. Kathy said the legislators and DNR requested that Steve and her provide support. PTC boots-on-the-ground participation is not anticipated.

Kankakee River Launch Group and Rensselaer Trail Overview

The Jasper County Trails Club has significant funding for placement of a kayak launch on the Kankakee River at Aukiki Wetland Conservation Area. On September 21, Steve sent a support letter to Jasper County Trails Club President, Michelle Lagestee, and Dustin Ritchea of Indiana Dues Tourism. He indicated the PTC "enthusiastically supports the development of public launches on the Kankakee River and Yellow River."

At Michelle's request, Kathy and Steve attended a September 28 public meeting in the Rensselaer City Hall to consider a trail proposal with local share and INDOT support. They answered questions and referenced positive experiences as trail neighbors. The meeting was a reminder of how fortunate and successful trail advocates have been in Starke County.

Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum Update

HVRM Liaison, Bob Albert, said the Pumpkin Trains are currently active, and they are again enjoying great success. 700 people have signed up for the coming weekend. After a stay of four years, the Bock Lumber Company 1 steam engine recently departed from the grounds.

Shirley Heinze Big Eastern Grand Opening on October 16

The Shirley Heinze Land Trust has scheduled the Big Eastern Grand Opening for October 16 at 3:00 pm at 1374 West 800 South, North Judson. The Big Eastern Land Trust has two parcels—this being the smaller one. Plans are to later provide a direct connection between the trail and the larger parcel near the SCR 100 West crossing. The event is open to the public, but the Shirley Heinze people request persons wishing to attend to RSVP. A link for the event is available at https://heinzetrust.org/event/big-eastern-grand-opening/.

Indiana Trails Advocates Coalition Meeting

Kathy attended the virtual ITAC meeting on September 29. The meeting underscored the general or default position that Class 1 and Class 2 e-bikes are allowed on nonmotorized trails, but Class 3 bikes are not. HVRM had recommended retaining those standards for our trail system, and that's what the PTC has done. By Indiana statute, a manufacturer or distributor of an electric bicycle shall affix a permanent and conspicuous label to each electric bicycle.

There have been incidents of unscrupulous persons printing false labels to disguise Class 3 bikes or other motorized vehicles as Class 1 or Class 2 bikes. Also, a vehicle that does not include pedals is not a bike, and it is subject to the laws governing motor vehicles. Electric scooters and similar vehicles are sometimes called "mobility devices" or "M-devices". The US Consumer Product Commission reports that injuries on these devices have increased from 10,500 in 2017 to nearly 80,000 by 2024.

Next Membership Meeting

The next membership meeting was set for November 19, 2026 at 5:30 p.m., CT (6:30 p.m., ET) in the BLPOA Community Center, 6996 South State Road 10, Knox (Bass Lake).

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:09 p.m., CT (8:09 p.m., ET).